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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [KNNP](#) [ETRD](#) [IR](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: MOSCOW UNDERSTANDS IRANIAN AMBITIONS, SAY RUSSIAN  
EXPERTS

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) Summary: In a recent round of meetings, prominent Russian analysts argued that Russia's long history of dealing with Iran and its willing understanding of Iran's ambitions to be a great power in the Middle East and wider Islamic world are two important factors in appreciating the GOR approach to Iran and its nuclear ambitions. The experts asserted that Moscow finds Iran more "level headed" than does the U.S., and remains firmly convinced that negotiations and incentives are more effective than threats when dealing with Tehran. The analysts stressed that Iran would one day become a nuclear power, despite the efforts of the U.S. and Russia, and that Russia would never countenance the military option for fear of turning Iran into an adversary. Finally, analysts argued that Russia's readiness to strengthen diplomatic efforts to thwart Iran's nuclear program was directly tied to the overall state of U.S.-Russian relations, and advised that the U.S. would receive greater GOR cooperation if it took Russian interests in other policy areas into account. End summary.

#### Russia Takes the Long View of Iranian Nuclear Ambitions

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12. (C) During a round of March 20-21 meetings to discuss Iran, prominent Russian analysts said that it was necessary to understand the "fundamentally different views" on Iran held by Washington and Moscow in order to appreciate the GOR's approach to the Iranian nuclear program. Russia took a "long-term view" of Iran and its regional ambitions, and did not simply see Tehran through the prism of events since the Iranian Revolution. "Iran has always been there, and always will," said Moscow Carnegie Center analyst Demitriy Trenin, who explained that Russia has traditionally had a "difficult" relationship with its neighbor, and learned to use incentives rather than "impose itself" on Tehran in the hope that it would submit to Moscow's point of view.

13. (C) Analysts stressed the importance of recognizing Iranian ambitions to be a major power in the Middle East and the wider Islamic world. Trenin explained that Iran's "mentality of a great power" was a key factor in its desire for a nuclear bomb. President of the International Center for Strategic and Policy Studies Vitaliy Naumkin underscored the role of "national pride" in Iran's nuclear ambitions, while Institute of Middle Eastern Studies President Yevgeniy Satanovskiy noted that Russia understood that Iran saw itself as an ancient culture on par with India and China that was similarly entitled to nuclear weapons. From the Iranian perspective, if Pakistan, a country only 60 years old, could have nuclear weapons, then why not Iran?

#### Iran More "Level Headed" than U.S. Believes

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14. (C) Analysts said that Moscow viewed Iran as more "level

headed" than Washington thought, and would not "nuke Israel" despite the threats by Ahmadinejad. Trenin explained that from the Russian perspective, Iran was "rational and fairly flexible." Russia feared that Iran would export revolution to Central Asia following the collapse of the USSR, but this did not occur. Instead, Iran supported Russian policy in Chechnya, helped calm instability in Tajikistan, and backed Russia gaining observer status in the Organization of Islamic Conferences (OIC).

15. (C) MFA Second Asia Department Deputy Director Ali Moustafabeliy claimed that the recent parliamentary elections, in which moderates won approximately 20 percent of the vote, demonstrated that "radicals have no future in Iran," and predicted Ahmadinejad would not win another term. He reiterated the point that Iran helped bring peace to Tajikistan, and said Iran could play a constructive role in Central Asia. "Iran," Moustafabeliy posited, "has interests that align with Russia's." He pointed to Iran's participation in Operation Channel, an anti-narcotics interdiction along the Afghan border, as an example of Iran cooperating with its neighbors to pursue a common goal, in this case, a stable Afghanistan.

16. (C) Naumkin argued that while "prestige" was certainly a factor in Tehran's desire to pursue nuclear weapons, Iran had legitimate concerns that its nuclear program addressed. Iran was surrounded by unfriendly neighbors and felt increasing pressure from the Arab world. Iran was also propelled by "purely commercial" interest in producing its own nuclear fuel. Having the domestic capacity to produce fuel would eliminate the threat of a cutoff from a foreign supplier, even a friendly supplier such as Russia.

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Will the U.S. Pursue Regime Change in Iran?  
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17. (C) Naumkin, particularly critical of U.S. policy toward Iran and its debilitating effect on the Middle East, advised that the U.S. begin dialogue with Tehran. He thought Iran's enrichment program was a subject of negotiation, opposing the U.S. demand of halting uranium enrichment as a precondition for dialogue. Naumkin and Moustafabeliy argued that despite U.S. efforts, the Iranian regime was not "scared" by sanctions, which only helped consolidate support for the government and overcome the "fractures" within Iranian society. Finally Naumkin charged that the U.S. was largely responsible for the presently fraught situation, saying, "You made Iran the most powerful player in the region by destroying Iraq."

Russia Does Not Want to Make Iran an Adversary  
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18. (C) Analysts were in agreement that there was little the international community could do to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Russia would rather tolerate a nuclear Iran than fight it, said Trenin, who explained that an overt Russian attempt to stop a nuclear Iran would insure that Iran became an adversary. Trenin said the GOR did not see a long-term strategy behind placing sanctions on Iran, and feared the sanctions regime was only setting the stage for the U.S. to turn to the military option.

Continuing Iranian Situation Hurts Russia's Interests  
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19. (C) Naumkin said that Russia's image in Iran suffered from the GOR working with the U.S. on sanctions. Naumkin told how he was criticized during a recent address in Tehran by Iranians who accused Russia of being an "American puppet." Russia was particularly worried about the growing sectarian divide in the Middle East, which was fueled by Iran's increasing isolation from the Arab states at a time when

conditions in Iraq put Iran in a better position to pursue its regional ambitions. Naumkin concluded that the situation increasingly called for dealing with Iran in a constructive manner rather than further antagonizing it.

¶10. (C) Trenin explained that Russia's global commercial interests were not helped by the controversy over Iran, where Russian trade was limited and not worth defending the Iranian regime over. Rosobronomexport and Rosatom had the largest stakes in Iran, but neither saw their future supplying weapons or nuclear services to "rogue states." Rosatom especially saw itself as a worldwide supplier of nuclear goods and services, even to the U.S., which would never happen so long as the company maintained links to the "axis of evil."

#### Iran and U.S.-Russia Relations

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¶11. (C) Analysts stressed that the GOR saw Iran as part of the "larger picture" of U.S.-Russia relations. Trenin argued that an important question for Moscow was how the U.S. viewed Russia's Iran policy. Moscow wants to be a "real cooperative partner," and could be more amenable to U.S. views on Iran if the U.S. did a better job of taking Russian interests into account on other issues. Most important for Russia was NATO expansion and recognition by Washington that Moscow's "natural desire" to maintain influence in the CIS, according to Trenin, was neither "imperial" nor "hegemonical."

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